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ABSTRACT

In spring 1994, enrollment began to drop at Virginia's Thomas Nelson Community College (TNCC), after having steadily increased between 1986-87 and 1993-94. The number of annual full-time equivalent students dropped 3.5% in 1994-95 to 4,394, another 3.8% in 1995-96 to 4,226, and another 11.3% in 1996-97 to 3,745. The college sought to provide a context for the enrollment losses by comparing data for the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) as a whole, state urban community colleges, and local four- and two-year colleges. Results of the analyses included the following: (1) enrollment in the VCCS as a whole declined by 6.9%, or 9,742 students, between fall 1991 and fall 1995, compared to a decline of 9.4% for TNCC; (2) for both the TNCC and the VCCS, the largest drop in enrollment was among students 20 to 34 years old; (3) although both TNCC and the VCCS experienced declines in attendance rates, or enrollment divided by population, TNCC's rates were below those of the VCCS for students of all ages; (4) while local state colleges experienced enrollment declines similar to those at TNCC during the period, they showed increases for 1996; and (5) the enrollment declines at TNCC between 1995 and 1997 were considerably higher than those at other urban community colleges in the state. Five data tables are included. (BCY)

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THOMAS NELSON
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A Preliminary Analysis of Recent Enrollment Trends

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A Preliminary Analysis of Recent Enrollment Trends

Beginning in the 1986–87 academic year and proceeding through 1993–94, Thomas Nelson Community College (TNCC) experienced a period of continuous and rapid enrollment growth. Annual FTES for 1993–94 reached 4555, more than 57 percent higher than the total for 1985–86 (Table 1). In Spring 1994, though, enrollment began to decline and has continued to do so; annual FTES fell to 4394 (a 3.5% drop) in 1994–95, 4226 (a 3.8% drop) in 1995–96, and 3745 in 1996–97 (an 11.3% annual drop and 17.8% over the three years). This research brief will provide a context for evaluating our enrollment losses by comparing our enrollment experience to various benchmarks (Virginia Community College System (VCCS), urban community colleges in Virginia, local 2– and 4–year colleges).

Table 2 shows enrollment at all VCCS colleges in Fall 1991 and Fall 1995 (latest date where age comparisons are available). Overall enrollment in the system fell by 9,742 students, a drop of 6.9 percent. TNCC's enrollment in Fall 1995 was 9.4 percent below 1991's total. For both TNCC and the VCCS, the largest drop in enrollment is among students in the 20–34 years range. Enrollment from this cohort fell by 17.5 percent for TNCC and 10.9 percent for the VCCS.

Table 3 shows attendance rates (i.e., enrollment ÷ population) for the three age cohorts for the VCCS and TNCC in Fall 1991 and Fall 1995. Population projections for both the state and the Peninsula show a decline in the 20–34 years cohort. The data also show declining attendance rates in each age group for both TNCC and the VCCS. Attendance rates for TNCC in all cohorts are below VCCS rates. If TNCC had maintained its 1991 attendance rates in 1995, enrollment would have been virtually the same (7945 v 7930 in 1991 and 7186 actual). The difference in attendance rates, therefore, is far more important than the declining population in the 20–34 years cohort. Of the 859 student decline in that group 610 (71.0%) is due to the reduced attendance rate. It also is worth noting that TNCC's attendance rate for the 18–19 years cohort is well below the VCCS average. If TNCC matched the 1995 VCCS average for this group, enrollment would have been 725 higher. Had TNCC matched the VCCS average attendance rate for all age cohorts, its enrollment for Fall 1995 would have been 8,607 (1,421 higher than the actual of 7,186).

Table 4 shows TNCC headcount enrollment for Fall 1991 through Fall 1996 compared to the VCCS and local state colleges. The most interesting finding is that both TNCC and CNU had experienced similar enrollment declines through 1995. Headcount enrollment at TNCC in 1995 was 9.9 percent below 1991's level; at CNU it was 9.5 percent lower. In Fall 1996 enrollment at CNU and the other local state universities rose slightly while TNCC, TCC, and the VCCS continued to drop.

Table 5 shows TNCC's annual FTES for six years compared to the VCCS and the other urban community colleges in Virginia. The college's decline over the last two years was considerably higher than the other urban community colleges and the VCCS.

These analyses show two areas in which the college could significantly improve attendance rates. Among the 18–19 years group the college's attendance rate has slipped since 1991 and has been considerably lower than the VCCS average. Maintaining the 1991 attendance rate would have added 78 students to 1995's total. Reaching the VCCS average, however, would have produced an additional 725 students. TNCC's lower attendance rate for younger students may reflect the relatively high availability

of options. With Christopher Newport University (CNU), Old Dominion University (ODU), and Norfolk State University (NSU) in the area, recent high school graduates have three relatively inexpensive and accessible four-year alternatives to the community college. Aspiring to the VCCS average, therefore, may be unrealistic; a return to earlier levels, however, should be achievable.

The second area where enrollments could improve dramatically is in the 20-34 years cohort. Although the population in this group is declining, a return to the 1991 attendance rate (which coincidentally is almost identical to the current VCCS rate) would increase enrollment by 610 students. This then would seem a very viable target group.

This brief only highlights areas of concern in our analysis of enrollment patterns. It shows where enrollment is slipping and demonstrates that other colleges are experiencing declines similar to but less severe than those faced by TNCC. We have no definitive answers to questions about why particular groups are showing declining enrollment rates. Over the course of the year we will work with the VCCS and our university partners to develop more detailed analyses that examine potential causes. Your suggestions regarding potential hypotheses would be especially valuable as we proceed.

Table 1
Thomas Nelson Community College
Annual and Quarter/Semester Headcount and FTES History
1968-69 to 1996-97

Academic Year	Annual Headcount and FTES		Quarter / Semester Headcount and FTES							
			Summer		Fall		Winter		Spring	
	HC	FTES	HC	FTES	HC	FTES	HC	FTES	HC	FTES
1968-69	2,104	861	24	9	1,251	952	1,267	886	1,293	736
1969-70	2,564	1,247	430	183	1,836	1,387	1,638	1,149	1,492	1,027
1970-71	3,088	1,515	709	327	2,215	1,552	2,047	1,494	1,751	1,174
1971-72	3,211	1,672	1,015	486	2,303	1,726	2,105	1,450	1,996	1,352
1972-73	3,865	1,795	1,105	552	2,641	1,718	2,529	1,616	2,356	1,502
1973-74	5,647	2,138	1,466	675	3,390	2,045	3,104	1,870	3,367	1,818
1974-75	6,380	2,685	1,530	753	4,034	2,401	3,991	2,459	4,023	2,455
1975-76	7,045	3,224	2,349	1,245	4,959	3,095	4,381	2,747	4,242	2,582
1976-77	7,041	3,063	2,084	1,077	4,618	2,814	4,297	2,677	4,409	2,623
1977-78	7,695	3,155	2,280	1,095	5,161	3,125	4,338	2,661	4,382	2,585
1978-79	8,337	3,229	2,574	1,135	5,512	3,081	4,729	2,780	4,918	2,726
1979-80	9,852	3,423	2,579	1,153	6,045	3,277	5,517	3,066	5,380	2,757
1980-81	10,334	3,692	2,585	1,211	6,379	3,534	5,841	3,289	5,647	3,045
1981-82	10,713	3,841	2,938	1,337	6,630	3,663	6,226	3,403	5,698	3,121
1982-83	9,967	3,659	2,716	1,181	6,284	3,546	5,903	3,296	5,463	2,955
1983-84	10,462	3,626	2,991	1,311	6,901	3,635	6,067	3,185	5,359	2,704
1984-85	9,570	3,161	2,529	1,061	6,151	3,152	5,376	2,808	4,880	2,661
1985-86	9,497	2,995	2,502	958	6,032	2,887	5,169	2,542	4,798	2,598
1986-87	10,609	3,076	2,614	904	6,506	3,009	5,892	2,730	5,497	2,665
1987-88	10,990	3,261	2,879	1,027	6,956	3,306	6,070	2,899	5,811	2,949
1988-89	10,124	3,377	2,598	965	6,640	3,148	...	...	6,566	3,041
1989-90	11,149	3,863	2,851	922	7,308	3,509	...	...	7,175	3,295
1990-91	11,777	4,066	3,431	1,030	7,780	3,636	...	...	7,304	3,465
1991-92	11,545	4,512	3,386	1,118	7,896	3,880	...	...	7,409	3,626
1992-93	11,428	4,491	3,338	1,113	7,815	3,966	...	...	7,810	3,862
1993-94	11,426	4,555	3,428	1,202	7,828	4,043	...	...	7,716	3,865
1994-95	11,017	4,394	3,571	1,280	7,483	3,933	...	...	7,240	3,655
1995-96	10,472	4,226	3,356	1,322	7,182	3,795	...	...	6,851	3,534
1996-97	10,027	3,745	2,869	885	6,627	3,580	...	...	6,509	3,217

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Table 2
Enrollment Changes
Fall 1991 — Fall 1995

VCCS Community College	Fall 1991				Fall 1995				Change			
	< 20	20-34	35 +	Total	< 20	20-34	35 +	Total	< 20	20-34	35 +	Total
BRCC	863	1,418	724	3,005	697	1,292	747	2,736	-166	-126	23	-269
CVCC	1,177	2,050	850	4,077	1,005	1,934	1,099	4,038	-172	-116	249	-39
DSLCC	443	728	483	1,654	430	627	422	1,479	-13	-101	-61	-175
DCC	1,208	1,474	921	3,603	1,340	1,391	1,278	4,009	132	-83	357	406
ESCC	138	318	174	630	181	330	173	684	43	12	-1	54
GCC	474	1,301	599	2,374	914	1,217	596	2,727	440	-84	-3	353
JSRCC	1,626	6,756	4,504	12,886	1,427	5,128	2,541	9,096	-199	-1,628	-1,963	-3,790
JTCC	655	2,827	1,805	5,287	639	2,717	2,014	5,370	-16	-110	209	83
LFCC	565	1,484	900	2,949	768	1,538	986	3,292	203	54	86	343
MECC	676	1,488	1,363	3,527	728	1,264	842	2,834	52	-224	-521	-693
NRCC	763	2,088	1,013	3,864	761	1,892	877	3,530	-2	-196	-136	-334
NVCC	5,336	23,875	8,971	38,182	5,026	23,163	9,895	38,084	-310	-712	924	-98
PHCC	540	1,207	775	2,522	543	1,167	894	2,604	3	-40	119	82
PDCCC	303	714	551	1,568	497	602	485	1,584	194	-112	-66	16
PVCC	624	2,322	1,290	4,236	687	1,993	1,596	4,276	63	-329	306	40
RCC	382	962	744	2,088	507	856	637	2,000	125	-106	-107	-88
SSVCC	949	1,445	1,004	3,398	1,424	1,167	856	3,447	475	-278	-148	49
SWVCC	1,030	2,786	2,970	6,786	984	1,852	1,394	4,230	-46	-934	-1,576	-2,556
TNCC	1,000	4,920	2,010	7,930	978	4,061	2,147	7,186	-22	-859	137	-744
TCC	2,507	11,649	4,556	18,712	2,406	9,988	4,960	17,354	-101	-1,661	404	-1,358
VHCC	612	1,120	576	2,308	524	911	479	1,914	-88	-209	-97	-394
VWCC	1,735	3,741	2,055	7,531	1,512	3,107	2,183	6,802	-223	-634	128	-729
WCC	713	1,121	626	2,460	657	1,081	821	2,559	-56	-40	195	99
Total	24,319	77,794	39,464	141,577	24,635	69,278	37,922	131,835	316	-8,516	-1,542	-9,742

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Table 3
Enrollment Changes
Fall 1991 — Fall 1995

Category	Fall 1991				Fall 1995				Difference			
	< 20	20-34	35-59	Total	< 20	20-34	35-59	Total	< 20	20-34	35-59	Total
Population	177,480	1,650,640	1,976,308	3,804,428	185,714	1,610,983	2,232,359	4,029,056	8,234	-39,657	256,051	224,628
VCCS Total Enrollment	24,319	77,794	39,464	141,577	24,635	69,278	37,922	131,835	316	-8,516	-1,542	-9,742
Attendance Rate	0.1370	0.0471	0.0200	0.0372	0.1327	0.0430	0.0170	0.0327				
VCCS at 1991 Attendance Rates					25,447	75,925	44,577	145,949	812	6,647	6,655	14,114
Peninsula Population	12,155	114,974	117,895	245,024	12,838	109,150	130,089	252,077	683	-5,824	12,194	7,053
TNCC Enrollment	1,000	4,920	2,010	7,930	978	4,061	2,147	7,186	-22	-859	137	-744
TNCC Attendance Rate	0.0823	0.0428	0.0170	0.0324	0.0762	0.0372	0.0165	0.0285				
Enrollment at 1991 Attendance Rate					1,056	4,671	2,218	7,945				
Enrollment at 1995 VCCS Rate					1,703	4,694	2,210	8,607				

Note
- Population projections were compiled by the Virginia Employment Commission based on 1990 census data.
- Projections for < 20 estimate 18-19 years population as 40 percent of the 15-19 age cohort. Enrollment for this group is the under 20 enrollment. Enrollment in the 35-59 age range actually includes all students 35 and older. Including the less than 18 and the 60 and older students only slightly overestimates the attendance rates because of the very small numbers involved.
- The enrollment figures also include out-of-state students because most of these are military-related and are included in population figures by the census.

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Table 4
Enrollment Patterns for TNCC and Selected Local Benchmark Colleges
Fall 1991 to Fall 1996

Fall Semester	Community College / University Headcount					
	TNCC	VCCS	TCC	CNU	ODU	NSU
Fall 1991	7,896	133,662	18,136	5,034	16,686	8,298
Fall 1992	7,815	132,840	16,944	4,880	16,507	8,624
Fall 1993	7,828	130,037	17,511	4,756	15,974	8,652
Fall 1994	7,483	129,510	17,749	4,705	16,490	8,667
Fall 1995	7,192	127,140	16,760	4,558	17,077	8,129
Fall 1996	6,627	123,337	16,199	4,565	17,800	8,351

Table 5
Annual FTES Comparisons for TNCC and Urban Community Colleges
1991-92 to 1996-97

Academic Year	Community College FTES					
	TNCC	VCCS	TCC	NVCC	JSRCC	VWCC
1991 - 92	4,311	75,020	10,781	21,345	5,732	3,582
1992 - 93	4,490	76,274	10,444	21,951	6,245	3,523
1993 - 94	4,555	75,706	10,576	21,964	5,817	3,400
1994 - 95	4,395	74,089	10,631	21,453	5,453	3,332
1995 - 96	4,224	72,741	10,486	21,142	5,256	3,302
1996 - 97	3,745	71,442	10,215	20,798	5,133	3,358
Δ 1993-94 to 1996-95	-3.5%	-2.2%	0.5%	-2.3%	-6.3%	-2.0%
Δ 1994-95 to 1995-96	-3.9%	-1.7%	-1.4%	-1.4%	-3.6%	-0.9%
Δ 1995-96 to 1996-97	-11.3%	-1.8%	-2.6%	-1.6%	-2.3%	1.7%

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